THE SCREEN

PAUL BOURGET

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A. Cattan


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The Screen

PAUL BOURGET

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The Reverse of a Modern Legend


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THE SCREEN.

CHAPTER I.

The Reverse of a Modern Legend.

In the month of June of last year, two of the most fashionable families of the young Faubourg Saint-Germain, those of Antoine de Lautrec and Guy de Sarliève, quitted Paris the day after the Grand Prix, to spend some weeks in England and take part in the close of the London season, before going, the first to Carlsbad, and the second to its estate in Picardie. Simultaneously with the departure of the families in question for London, a young man known to be in love with one of the ladies also started for England. It may be added that this passion was openly acknowledged by Vicomte

Bertrand d'Aydie for the beautiful Marquise Alyette de Lautrec, whose reputation had never been tarnished by slanders of scandal-mongers. She was on this account particularly distinguished in the world of the Faubourg. Mme. de Lautrec had enjoyed for some years among her friends the renown of being sincere in her piety, which in its character was almost devotional. The purity, the severity of her conscience was so evident and so clear to the companions of her youth that not even the least suspicion existed respecting the attentions of D'Aydie, and the most dangerous and guilty indiscretion on his part would have been found by them as compromising only to himself. Moreover, had the frequenters of the drawing-rooms and clubs commented upon the departure of Bertrand in the train of the Marquise they would have simply deemed him misled, and their impressions would have reflected upon him alone.

"Still another of Bertrand's schemes. He never fails to have some folly on hand," said Crucé, who had the worst tongue in Rue Royale, as he pointed out the paragraph in the journal in which the name of Mme. de Lautrec figured in an announcement headed, "Change of Residence and Villeggiatura." Before it were the tell-tale words: "To London."

"To London," repeated Crucé. "He is going to weary poor Alyette, who could not endure his attentions in Paris. Had you but heard her when I spoke of him to her a few days ago. The tone of utter indifference in which she said, 'Oh, no, I assure you, I am not annoyed by him.' Men should have more dignity than to thrust their attentions where they are not wanted."

"Well, what would you do?" asked a young provincial noble, who entertained unlimited faith in the opinions of Parisians in general and of Crucé in particular as a man of the

world; a professional parasite of whom Casal had said, comically, "He passes for a connoisseur of cigars on the strength of having accepted them."

"Well, I would love elsewhere," replied Crucé. "It happens, nine times out of ten, that such a move gives us into the bargain those who have disdained us. This would not be the case with Alyette," he added, quickly. "I have known her since she was no higher than that; she is a saint."

"Poor Alyette," said, at the same hour, Madame de Corcieux, who felt sorry for Mme. de Lautrec, as she showed her husband the same announcement in the newspaper. "The young booby has followed her to England and will never rest contented until he causes her to be talked about. Happily, she is one of those women before whom calumny is disarmed."

"It makes no difference," replied the worthy De Corcieux, famous for

thirty years of blind conjugal confidence. "Still in Lautrec's place, I would ask him to be more discreet. It would be rendering him a great service. Bertrand is a fine fellow, but he makes a fool of himself running about Europe after his idol's trunks."

If he braved the world at large by making an exhibition of hypnotic, platonic adoration, which appeared to society ridiculous; if he consented to play a part which led the wondering to regard him as too much in love, to "hide his passion," as is said in tragedies, it was because there was an underlying motive and reason for his conduct. But for the secret motives of our visible conduct who in all Paris is sufficiently interested to try to seek? In no other place do they accept more quickly a person for what he represents himself than in Paris, particularly when it is a matter of the sentimental order. All the ladies of the De Corcieux family and the Crucés who

jested gaily, or cruelly, on the subject of the hopeless passion of Bertrand d'Aydie, would have been surprised to the extent of stupor, even indignation, if, some days after the announcement of the departure of the young man for London, the same day and on the same train with the Marquise Alyette, they could have magically transported themselves to London, and on a bright day, at half-past eleven o'clock in the morning, have wended their way to Kensington Park. They would there have seen, to the great humiliation of their malice, the great "booby" advancing, smiling and delighted, toward a woman who evidently awaited him, and toward whom the young man hastened with the step of a happy lover who eagerly approaches his beloved one. It was not the pure and serious Mme. de Lautrec who smiled a welcome. It was her intimate friend, the gay, reckless Emmeline de Sarliève, whose frank and childlike laughter, whose good fel-

lowship, and, above all, whose intimacy with the irreproachable Alyette, protected her from suspicion and slander. This proves, in parenthesis, that in love classic deceptions are always the best, and that a pronounced admiration for a pretty woman is an infallible way of making an impenetrable mystery of an intimacy with another. A humorist has brightly dubbed such unconscious accomplices of marital disloyalty "screen-women."

With her soft blue orbs, her complexion of the rich tint of the tea rose, her regular features, the mouth disclosing pearl-like teeth, her wavy golden hair and slight, graceful figure, the sovereign distinction of her bearing, the innate art of her toilet, her amiability, keen intelligence, her great name, her beautiful soul, all of which combined to render her worthy of being loved for herself, the exquisite Mme. de Lautrec served simply as a screen for her best friend and the lover of this friend.

It is a sad truth to announce, but it is an experience as common as it is vulgar, that happy love soon loses the sense of right and delicacy when it is a question of satisfying its happiness. On this beautiful morning at the beginning of an English summer, neither the romantic Emmeline de Sarliève, nor the sentimental D'Aydie, appeared to experience the least scruple respecting the double lie on which their *liaison* rested, deception toward the husband, deception toward their intimate friend. They walked now side by side, the delicious scenery of the park spread around them immense green sward, where sheep grazed as though in the open country, and where idlers, extended upon the grass, slept beneath the caress of the soft sunlight. This profound peace was almost rustic, and yet this delightful retreat was only a few steps from Piccadilly. The joy of a tête-à-tête on the morning after an evening reception at the residence of one of the most prudish

duchesses of Belgrave Square and on the eve of a delightful garden party with another, equally prudish, added zest to their interview and silenced all reproach of conscience. Never had the caressing countenance of her friend appeared more attractive to Emmeline; never had she herself appeared more lovely and seductive; with every smile her dazzlingly white teeth gleamed through her parted lips, and her dark, lustrous eyes shone with a bright light. In her light mauve gown, under an umbrella of changeable silk, with her small, slender hands finely gloved, she invited admiration. Coquettish, but useless, jewels hung upon a chain from her neck, and a gold band circled her waist. She presented truly a delicious figure, suggestive of Watteau. So exquisite was the charm of Mme. de Sarliève that any one would have granted the young man absolution, as he said:

"Dear, dear Emmeline. How happy I am to-day that you did not

listen to my objections when you spoke of taking this journey to London. Until now I never understood those lovers who have the fancy to carry on their love affairs far from their own country. How well I understand them now. How well I appreciate the charm of being able to adore you in this new frame. How delightful is the joy, the happiness of living here in the midst of this great city where I am known to few, and where I can enjoy being with you unobserved."

"Oh foolish boy!" interrupted Emmeline, with the touching irony women assume to repress extravagance. She knew instinctively that the truest emotions are those that are the most mute. A man who repeats too often that he is happy would be silent, if indeed as happy as he asserts.

"I am more prosaic," she continued. "It is the security of being among strangers which to me seems so delightful. While in Paris I

never dared to walk with you in the Bois, and I so often desired to do so. Yes, this expedition is perfectly delicious. It would seem to be almost too great happiness, and I feel as though something will happen."

"Something," repeated the young man, laughing a laugh of rash confidence. "But what, pray?"

"How do I know?" she replied. "What if Guy should become jealous, for instance?"

"He jealous? What an idea. Yesterday, after dinner at Lady Helston's, when we remained at table to drink, after the ladies had gone from the room, according to the queer custom of this country, he came and seated himself beside me. Lord Helston's champagne and port wine must certainly have had an effect upon him, for he was very expansive. He settled himself down to talk with me about Mme. de Lautrec, and in a tone of voice that clearly solicited my sentiments and opinions upon the subject. Sometimes," Bertrand

continued, thoughtfully, "I would almost prefer him to be jealous; but, above all, I wish he would converse less about Marquise Alyette."

"But, why?" asked Mme. de Sarliève, seriously, ceasing to smile. Her seriousness was momentary, and again her soft brown eyes gleamed with gaiety and coquetry, as she continued, "At least, you certainly do not fear to fall in love? But why not? It is just what might happen. I have said to myself that I am very imprudent to place such trust in you. Alyette is one of the most charming of women, and men who are regarded as the most honorable are the least so when it is a question of love."

The pretty Countess said this seriously, and with reason, for she had been the first to suggest the Machiavelian idea of having a screen-friend.

Bertrand listened seriously, and, if, by shaking his head, he sought to deny the assertion, he could but re-

flect upon the words of his companion. He nevertheless dared proclaim his honor in love—he, the docile executor of this dishonest imposture.

"That which reassures me," continued Mme. de Sarliève, without heeding D'Aydie, "is that Alyette is a veritable saint."

"You see," interrupted the young man, to whom this conversation was doubtless far from agreeable, "I am getting tired of hearing her eulogy. Do you know what might happen? Why, that it will become impossible for me to continue this innocent comedy of the hopeless lover, to whom every one comes to sing the virtues of his beloved. What sort of an occupation must that be when it is really followed without compensation?"

"But, we have compensation," replied Emmeline, coquettishly, either reassured by the bantering tone of her friend or because she judged as impolitic this allusion to the possibilities which had for some time

troubled her thoughts too frequently. Then, with a shade of sadness in her voice and manner, which betrayed her instinctive jealousy, and as though she desired to assert that she belonged to herself, she continued, reservedly:

"Have you received the invitation to go with us to visit Lady Semley, to remain at her country-seat from Saturday until Monday? She asked me for your address, last evening, to send the invitation."

"I have received and accepted it," he replied.

"I have news to announce," she continued. "Guy will not be of the party. He has accepted an invitation to breakfast on Sunday with, I know not whom, and, afterward, to go and look at some horses. That is why I had you invited."

A moment of silence followed between them. They exchanged glances and smiles in which burned the light of the hope of a rendezvous; but as their glances met their eyes were

lowered, as though, notwithstanding the feeling of joy, they experienced a sense of shame at the thought of the deceptions to which they had yielded to purchase their happiness.

Their happiness? Yes, everything indicated that they were happy. Had they not, at this very moment, surrounded their love with ideal conditions peculiar to the poetry of forbidden adventure and stolen love? The ease accorded by wealth, the charm of refinement, youth, beauty, and mystery, all were theirs, and they were far from Paris and its customs. Yes, they ought to be happy. Whatever remorse they secretly felt at the deception they were practising upon their friends, was stifled and remained unspoken between them. Bertrand satisfied his conscience by looking with delight at the beauty of his friend, and he repeated, while gazing at her passionately:

"What a lovely morning! How happy I am, and how I love you!"

II

A Dangerous Game


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CHAPTER II.

A Dangerous Game.

Was the young man sincere in his protestations? Had he been questioned, he would certainly have answered "Yes," and any one who had seen him follow this pretty woman with his eyes, when they were about to separate, would have thought the same. It was at the Queen's Gate, a little before one o'clock, that Emmeline consulted the tiny watch pinned to her waist, a paradoxical jewel which informed D'Aydie that she was "decorated with the order of pas(t)time," and she exclaimed:

"And I am to breakfast at the other side of Hanover Square!"

"Don't worry," he replied, laughing; "there is no possibility of arriving late at an English luncheon."

He hailed a hansom and assisted his companion to enter it. His eyes

followed her regretfully, while she watched him through the little glass window of the cab, exchanging a mute adieu. Would he have experienced this feeling of sadness at their separation had he not loved her with passionate fervor? He took another cab and gave the coachman his address in Dover Street, which was not far from the hotel in Berkeley Square, where Alyette and Emmeline were staying. As he drove along his thoughts wandered to the woman whom he had just left. Twenty images of her floated before his memory, all charming and smiling. He seemed again to see her as when first they met on the day on which he had been introduced into the world of Paris. How she had delighted him even from that first day. He recalled the occasion of his first visit and the beginning of his love-making, and, it must be acknowledged, the ease with which she tied the knot of their *liaison*. After two years he was, if possible, more deeply in love

than on the first day. At least he thought so, and said to himself:

"Here I am in London because Emmeline came. I, who detest traveling, and who have sworn again and again to remain always free. I had vowed never to form any tie in the world, and yet I am in love with a woman who is married, which means that the links of the chain are doubled. I left Paris for a caprice; *en route* the caprice became a passion. But she is beautiful, brilliant and amusing, and yet I have cared heretofore only for dreamers."

As he said this another phantom arose before him, a phantom whose eyes were not brown, whose curls were not chestnut, and whose smile possessed no dimples like those of Emmeline. Now Bertrand saw no longer her whom he loved, or thought he loved, but the one he had feigned to love, and was very sure of never loving, Alyette de Lautrec, the screen-friend.

Bertrand d'Aydie, at the age of

twenty-five, was truly young. Not in the literal acceptation of the term, because vice had already touched him and he was like a handsome fruit stung by a worm, but he retained a freshness of impressions which rendered him in a sense an innocent roué. Such are to be met with always in society, where, in default of other interests, pleasure becomes the principal aim of life. Bertrand belonged by nature to the noble race of the lovers of love, to those for whom the feminine universe is the supreme attraction, and soon, if no action corrects the first fancy, becomes the only one. These lovers of love are not lovers only. They are artists in emotion, always in quest of a still more subtle sensation, a joy more intense, a grief more bitter, and are unable to remain faithful to a monotonous fidelity, a tender constancy. These seekers of sensations are ingenious, instinctively changeable and perfidious, and they are still more dangerous because

they preserve, even through sad experiences, simplicity and perfect faith in the ideal. In their youth such men are particularly formidable to a woman credulous, passionate and secretive, as was Alyette de Lautrec.

"Yes, if the portraits of both Emmeline and Alyette had been shown me before knowing them," continued Bertrand, "I would have made a bet that I would fall in love with Alyette. Emmeline realizes this at moments. She is capable of going to Alyette and telling her all our story, and should she do so, what would be Alyette's opinion of me? How could I make her understand that, if I choose to play before her the rôle of one who sighs, it is because I know her to be irreproachable and so entirely insensible?—Insensible!"

He surprised himself by repeating the word aloud, "Insensible?" These syllables evidently aroused within him a lively curiosity, for he imme-

diately ordered the cabman to drive to the hotel in Berkeley Square, where he was sure at this hour to meet only the Marquise.

Bertrand d'Aydie experienced, when ascending the stairs leading to the apartment occupied by Mme. de Lautrec, a sudden impulse of joy, and this joy would certainly not have been such as it was had he not had still in his memory the sound of the voice of another, of the woman for the worldly peace of whom he feigned to love Alyette. Some physiognomists pretend that the right lobe and the left lobe of our brains constitute each in themselves a complete brain. A dissociation, however slight, between the two brains produce the strangest discords in our personality. We desire this; it is our right brain that wills. We desire almost instantly the contrary; it is the left brain that negatives. The real lover of the worldly Emmeline, the pretended love of the pious Alyette did not assuredly suspect

this convenient and fantastic theory He acted so ingenuously, so criminally, if you will, that his heart beat slightly when the footman of the Marquise introduced him into her little boudoir, where everything in the surroundings bespoke the refinement of the traveler, who interrupted her writing to receive Bertrand.

She was seated at a desk drawn beside the window that looked out upon the foliage of the great trees of Berkeley Square, the handsomest in London, which shed their grateful shade around this sombre hotel, furnished in the style of ten years past.

She wore a dark blue gown, the hue of which accentuated still more the fairness of her skin, that resembled the petals of the lily. This lily was a young and very beautiful woman, whose taste in the matter of toilet mingled simplicity and coquetry.

One more of a coxcomb than Bertrand would have discerned that this

lily was also a woman vaguely troubled by the visit she now received. Her slender fingers trembled nervously in her effort to replace the pen, her voice shook somewhat in her reply to his first question, although it was but an idle remark of the young man on her fatigue consequent upon the ball of the preceding night.

The young man had not been there long before the Marquise introduced the ordinary topics of their daily conversation. The rôle adopted by D'Aydie, that of a timid lover, one who never declares himself, did not lend to animated conversation, nor did he desire that it should.

That which charmed Bertrand most in Alyette was her dreamy, romantic nature, and her absolute avoidance of any seeming recognition of his assiduities; it was, if one may so say, her "distant presence," her strictly circumspect movements, the calm sound of her voice, her measured sentences and carefully weighed

words in which he found such exquisite delicacy, reserve, and modesty as charming as the most subtle perfume. What she thought of him, to what degree she was flattered by his admiration, why she accepted this discreet and guarded admiration, which was, in fact, a sort of avowal of love, he knew not, nor did he seek to know. A very distant cousinship with De Lautrec justified his intimacy in the family, and the tête-à-tête with Alyette in no degree recalled the conversation enjoyed with Emmeline beneath the trees of the park. Was it the contrast that allured, or did D'Aydie appreciate in truth, the woman before him?

These brief moments alone with her seemed always too fleeting, for the door of the Marquise was never closed to callers, and it was rare, in Paris, that visitors did not come to interrupt the charm of their tête-à-tête. Would it be the same in London? He hoped not. Nevertheless, even in the hours of greatest inti-

macy Alyette's reserve remained intact, and she gave utterance to no single word that could not have been spoken before the whole world. On this particular day, the words that fell from her beautiful lips expressed her impressions of London, but there was in her bearing a subtle something which seemed to suggest an underlying and unspoken sentiment. It seemed, however, that their interview was on this day to terminate, as on all other days, without a single word being spoken that would become memorable.

"That which surprises me most and which makes me almost ashamed of our customs, is to see how very hospitable the English are," said Alyette. "For instance, when you entered, I was replying to Lady Semley. She knows that M. de Lautrec and I admire the Murillos of Strafford House, and, as she possesses some magnificent pictures and other works of art in her country house, she has invited us to visit her from

Saturday until Monday in company with Emmeline and her husband."

"The invitation has also been extended your humble servant," replied Bertrand.

A brief silence followed, which, for a time, neither seemed willing to interrupt. It was, at length, broken by the young man, who made allusion to the paintings in question. Bertrand realized that in the silence there had been more meaning than in many words spoken by a woman of the world. He had accepted the invitation; he also would be of the party. They would meet.

"Have you not been attracted also by the numberless works of art in London?" he said. "This very morning I, by chance, visited the National Gallery and viewed the historic pictures and portraits. I remained several hours, and was much interested. I would, in fact, have remained longer had I not desired to inquire after your health."

It was true that he had visited the

Gallery the day before, but why he should have said that he had just made the visit in question he could not explain.

"I thank you for the suggestion," replied Mme. de Lautrec; "I will ask Antoine to take me to the gallery. By-the-by, we neither breakfast nor dine out to-day."

It was Friday, and Bertrand knew that the devout Marquise feared not to be able to abstain from meat at the table of a Protestant. As though desiring to avoid any suggestion of religious scruples, she added:

"After a week in London, you know, a poor little Frenchwoman has a right to enjoy a rest. These handsome English women are made of steel. Lady Helston, who gave us that magnificent ball last night, had, at two o'clock in the afternoon, opened an exposition of tissues made in her county by the poor, and she also made a speech. It would seem that she is quite an orator. You do not admire such energy, I suppose?"

"Not very much," he replied. "I belong to the old school. Woman, for me, represents here below all that is delicate and fragile. Woman should award the prizes at the tournament, but she should never descend into the arena."

"There is, nevertheless, a social duty," replied the frail Alyette, with a vivacity which, from time to time, proclaimed her emotion, "and that is the truest charity, when a woman contributes herself. I am much interested in the question," she added, with a smile which corrected that which she doubtless found indicated too much energy. "I would never have the physical endurance— Good, here is M. de Lautrec!" she concluded, hearing her husband at the door.

"I am a little late," said Antoine, addressing his wife. "I make you take your luncheon too much after the English fashion. I have just come from the park. Heavens! what a pleasure it is to be in a country where everything is in its proper

place! A park where only private carriages are permitted to enter. What intelligence! How entirely proper! We should introduce the custom in Paris. We really do not know how things should be done. A book of peerage at our service like this," and he pointed as he spoke to a huge red volume on the table, "this is what we lack in France. Is it not your opinion, D'Aydie? But you are a Radical, as were your ancestors of the night of August 4. You have seen, however, how they ended. Will you remain and lunch with us? The air must have given you an appetite, as it has me. I saw you a short time ago. I was at the extreme end of Rotten Row when you were coming down the grand avenue at Kensington with Emmeline. I did not see De Sarlève."

"Decidedly," thought Bertrand, while the little man delivered himself of his discourse, "only husbands permit themselves to gabble in such a manner. He will relate this meet-

ing to De Sarliève. I could swear to it. Pshaw! it is of no importance, after all. Emmeline will tell him that she met me by chance. She has, it is more than likely, had the forethought to tell him so already. It is her principle never to lie uselessly, and she is right, while I but now told Alyette that I had been visiting the National Gallery!" All these ideas presented themselves to his mind as he replied, with apparent indifference:

"So you saw me? Yes, I accompanied Mme. de Sarliève a few steps. I met her by chance while crossing the park; I regret not to have seen you. We might have returned together. No, thanks; I cannot lunch with you to-day. I expect some one myself, and must go at once."

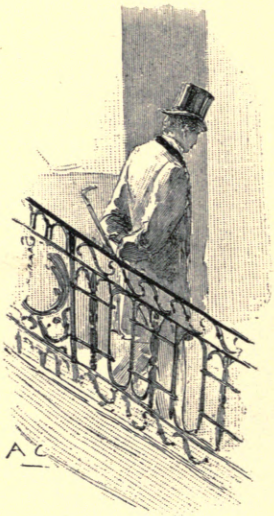
Five minutes later, he went away in a singularly bad humor.

"It is too stupid that I should have told Mme. de Lautrec that I had just left the Gallery when I called upon her. What reason had I to try to

prove an alibi when no questions were being asked me?" He laughed at the thought. "It was a bad conscience! And what is still more stupid is that I did not dare to look at Alyette while Antoine convicted me of this falsehood, for I could not have been at Kensington and at the same time at Trafalgar Square, nor could I very well pass through Kensington on my return here from Trafalgar Square. It is rather out of the way. But she will not think anything about it. She is so indifferent to me!"

III

In Love Without Knowing It



CHAPTER III.

In Love Without Knowing It.

"Is it 'by chance' that Bertrand makes love to Emmeline, I wonder?" said Lautrec, with an equivocal smile, to his wife when they were alone together.

Marquise Alyette appeared shocked.

"What an idea! You put too much stress upon his words. One would really think that you were delighted with your flight of fancy."

"Oh!" continued Lautrec, "fancy, is it? D'Aydie is young; he is a handsome and intelligent man. He is always wherever Emmeline may be found, remember that. As to De Sarlève, I like him very much; but, between ourselves, he is more like his mother than his father. She was none too clever, a misfortune repeat-

ed in him. In a word, De Sarlève is very ordinary. It is quite natural that Bertrand has been encouraged, and I notice he appeared not a little annoyed when I spoke to him just now of his morning tête-à-tête with Emmeline in Kensington Gardens."

"And why should not Emmeline and he have met by chance—just as he told you quite simply?" interrupted Alyette, with vivacity. "A man does not make love to a woman unless she permits him to do so, and Emmeline would not allow such a thing. She is not a woman to permit of compromising attentions from any man, and you know that if she were, I would never have anything to do with her."

"Great heavens!" replied her husband, becoming alarmed at the tone of his wife, "I did not intend to imply that your friend is a woman of light character. Bertrand could be in love with her without her being aware of the fact."

"A woman is always aware of

such things." replied the Marquise, whose growing nervousness would have surprised a more thoughtful man than Antoine de Lautrec. He saw in it only a sign of the affection which united the two young women.

"It is by such insinuations," continued Mme. de Lautrec, "that irreproachable reputations have been compromised. A word is lightly spoken and repeated. Finally, a story is told. Whence it came or how originated, no one knows, but the harm is done all the same."

"You are right," replied Lautrec, entirely disarmed. "Harm might have been done had I perpetrated this joke before any one else but you. Rest assured I know the world too well, and I have too much respect for Emmeline. Then, if poor Guy is rather ordinary, he is a good fellow, and I would be among the first to regret that his wife should be talked about. All the more so," he added, earnestly, "because I am very—yes,

very—fond of Bertrand, and with any one as quick-tempered as Guy a suspicion would be easily aroused, and, once suspicious, he would believe the worst and insult Bertrand, who is not long-suffering. An affair between them would be the result, and as De Sarlièvе is a good shot, and as skilful with his sword as Machault, I would be in despair. You see, we both think the same of dear Emmeline, and my pleasantry will end here. Besides." he concluded, philosophically, "it is not my affair. Good, the luncheon is ready; half-past one," he added, looking at his watch. "These English are not so bad, after all. It is astonishing how this lengthens the day."

"What made you say that De Sarlièvе is quick-tempered?" asked the Marquise. Understanding her husband as she did, she feared that he hid something from her. Antoine de Lautrec appeared embarrassed, but they now entered the dining-room, and as certain topics were in-

terdicted before witnesses, he profited by the presence of the servants to evade an answer, which the sudden severity of his wife would have rendered painful.

"Oh, nothing important," he replied. "You made me think of it. We met just now, De Sarlève and I; it was as I came in. He had hailed a carriage to go out to luncheon. We exchanged a few words; I had no reason to hide from him that I had just seen Emmeline and Bertrand at Kensington."

"And then?" she asked, anxiously.

"Well, he did not say anything; but since I have spoken to you upon the subject, I think I was wrong, and I am inclined to think he appeared annoyed. I may be deceived, however, because at the time I was not so impressed. No, not at all."

The maladroit but very loyal descendant of the De Lautrecs had a genius only for unraveling the complicated skein of relationships, and he failed entirely to comprehend

Alyette's present humor, so strongly in contrast to her usual manner. She ate of but little, and spoke scarcely twenty words. After leaving the table she complained of a headache, and announced her intention of resting, in order to be in a condition to go at five o'clock to Durlock House, one the most magnificent establishments in London, where the countess of the same name, the pretty and *spirituelle* Lady Durlock, gave a reception. This at least afforded her husband a pretext to drop the subject spoken of before the meal, and he began to give some genealogical details of this great family of Durlock and of the Scottish nobility in general. During the few days he had been in London he knew already by heart all the titles of the twenty-one English dukes and eldest sons of the dukes. The order of the precedence of the marquises was no secret to him; he knew even the date of the creation of all the earls anterior to the

Georges. Usually the young wife entertained an artless ridicule, a laughing indulgence for this weakness, while realizing the real virtue that Antoine de Lautrec developed in himself by his respect for his own name. He had renounced a large fortune because it had been acquired by a near ancestor through a marriage with the daughter of a grubbing financier. On this particular morning her impatience was great, and she interrupted him by saying that she was suffering and desired to be alone. He left her, saying, in a tone that under other circumstances would have touched her:

"You have forgiven me, have you not, for my thoughtlessness respecting Emmeline?"

"Certainly," she said, shrugging her shoulders. "I shall not think of it again."

If the pretext of the headache was but a half falsehood, this last little phrase constituted, in fact, an entire falsehood, but very venial. How

could Alyette acknowledge to her husband the truth of her sentiments? She herself scarcely understood the irritation she had experienced from the moment she noticed the altered expression of Bertrand d'Aydie's face when Antoine de Lautrec had spoken of the promenade in Kensington Park with Emmeline, and, instantly, instinctively she asked herself a question respecting which each phrase her husband had uttered was an almost insupportable commentary.

"Why did both of them hide this walk from me? Did he not tell me he had passed the morning in the Gallery, while she, on going out, told me she was going shopping? They both lied to me, and why?"

The reply to this question the simple common sense of Antoine de Lautrec had divined, and when Alyette had revolted so quickly against the idea that Bertrand was making love to Emmeline, this revolt was addressed more particu-

larly to her own thoughts than to the inoffensive gossip of her husband. But if her indignation imposed silence upon the subject, the thought was not killed, and from the beginning of the breakfast up to the time that De Lautrec, banished, had crossed the threshold of the door and she found herself alone, free to search her soul, she had not ceased to repeat the simple words: "Bertrand makes love to Emmeline," and each time she uttered them mentally, it was as though a thorn pierced her brain. Each time she endured this agony, one more experienced would have recognized a cry of jealousy most startling and characteristic.

The irreproachable Alyette had never admitted to herself, even for a second, that she cared for Bertrand d'Aydie. She was too modest, too reserved, too pious to conceive that she could experience anything of love outside of marriage; and on this afternoon, when, in the quiet of her room, she recalled again and again

what her husband had revealed, the pretty woman failed to realize the true inwardness of her own sentiments. The image of her perfidious friend and that of the young man, so associated, tortured her mind with feelings which she refused to accept, and which she did not understand. She repelled them, for to admit that she was jealous was to acknowledge that she was in love. And at this very moment when the suffering of jealousy came to reveal this love, she refused to acknowledge it, and, in reality, did not realize the full truth. No, no more than she saw the thick foliage of the trees that threw their long shadows upon the window from the square without, although she looked at them through her half-closed eyes. All her mind was concentrated on the thoughts that this sudden suspicion had called forth, and, in spite of herself, she murmured, "They appoint interviews and hide them from me."

"Oh, well," she thought, "it must

have been an accidental meeting, and yet, had it been accidental, would he not have told me about it and not have lied? For he did lie to me, and deliberately."

She scarcely knew what name to give D'Aydie when she reflected upon his deception. This alone should have taught her how deeply the young man troubled her soul, but this trouble could also be explained by the discovery of the indelicate game the lovers had played with her, and she continued to reason.

"It is not only to-day that I have thought they acted strangely toward each other. But what an unworthy comedy, and how could any one suppose that they would plan to play it? When he began to visit me so frequently, I remember Emmeline jested upon the subject. I can hear her say: 'I assure you that he has an attachment. It is plainly to be seen.' She, my companion from childhood; she, whom I have loved so dearly, to

deceive me thus! No, it is impossible. As to him, when I recall his delicacy, his respectful attention, and how sincerely I have esteemed him, this hypocrisy seems impossible. Why should he deceive me?"

The pure, noble soul of the woman halted at this point. She could not, she dare not, formulate the obvious conclusion: "They have used me in order to carry on their intrigue. He assumed to love me, and she pretended to believe that he loved me, in order that the acknowledged passion should protect the true passion." To this conclusion Alyette was forced to come in the end, despite her efforts to excuse, and she was, moreover, compelled to acknowledge that this was not the first sign that she had of a mysterious understanding between D'Aydie and Mme. de Sarlève. The guilty ones, grown bolder, had committed many imprudent acts, which ended by arousing in the most blind a latent suspicion that rendered the least event evidence.

This sudden awakening to the fact of such long duplicity filled Alyette with feelings of indignation and anger; but alas! they were not inspired by virtue in revolt, or insulted friendship. She now recalled past events, as well as more recent ones, which she interpreted in an entirely new light.

"It was then because of this," she soliloquized again, "that, fifteen days ago, when Bertrand called to ask me if I had any commissions for London and I replied, 'I am going myself,' he appeared so little surprised. Our journey was decided on that morning with Emmeline. She had told him, but I did not then understand. When she asked me a few evenings since to present her to Lady Semley, it was because she desired to have him invited to visit the country with us to-morrow. I did not comprehend this winter, when she was to dine with me, for what purpose she said, 'Be good to D'Aydie; invite him. He is so devoted, and he places you on

such a pedestal.' It was that she might meet him at our house, and I did not understand. I was blind. When I allowed myself to be teased by one person or another upon his fancy for me, I smiled and thought it was my duty not to punish one who had in every way shown himself to be such a true and honest man, and did not merit the malignity of the world. During this very time he was pursuing this secret intimacy. What intimacy? Since they desired to hide it, what was the nature of the intimacy? No, no, I am dreaming. It cannot be possible; it is not possible!"

Such were the alternating doubts and convictions that passed through the mind of this woman, whom all the world called a saint.

These drawing-room canonizations have generally nothing in common with those of the Church. Alyette de Lautrec was, in reality, a soul deeply and infinitely sensible, unconsciously romantic, with great

faith, and an innate taste for regularity, and, above all, for the strict observance of conventionality. This sort of women enjoy in society a success analogous to that of certain books, "very well written, very well conceived," but their leaves are left unturned. They are spoken of seriously in terms of respect, and then the speakers pass on to the wicked novels of the day. Pretty as Alyette was, and although she lived in the midst of the highest of Parisian society, where gallantry and idleness go hand-in-hand, no man had ever occupied himself with thoughts of her. The clubmen and sporting men, among whom the professional lovers of Paris are found, were positively too practical to lose their time near a woman who was not coquettish, and whom they knew to be protected by real principle. The Marquise had arrived at the age of twenty-eight without any love affair having crossed her life. For her husband she entertained only esteem. Their two

children had died soon after their birth. De Lautrec, with his strange mania for pedigrees, gave attention to but little else. These various circumstances caused an existence irreproachable, but completely empty, so the apparently disinterested and delicate attentions of Bertrand d'Aydie had assumed, little by little, a place in her life. The saint was, however, about to perceive the danger that is run, when one is tender and dreamy and the subject of an innocent but indefinable influence, in which no word of love is spoken, but in which it is not the less felt. A day will come, an hour, in which the truth is realized; when the knowledge is forced upon the mind: that the heart we thought filled alone by friendship, peaceful, tender friendship, has become the abode of love, a love passionate and deep, a love in which the entire being is absorbed. To such truths many have awakened. When love has stolen into the soul

it is too late to root it out, without destroying the one who loves.

How long Mme. de Lautrec remained thus crushed by her thoughts and her emotions, wrapped in her memories, she knew not. A vulgar detail brought reality back to her; it was the entrance of her maid, who inquired what toilet she proposed to make for her afternoon outing. She looked at the clock. It was nearly five. She had been nearly two hours occupied by her thoughts. She suddenly recollected that she was expected at Lady Durlock's. And by whom? By Emmeline de Sarlève herself. Her first impulse was to say: "I will not go," but at the second she dressed herself as quickly as possible. When jealousy commences to awaken there arises at the same time the desire to know all. This led her to wish to see before her eyes the faces of those whom she suspected of complicity. In the hired victoria which carried her to Mount Street, near Park Lane, where was to

be found the imposing Durlock House, she asked of herself: "What will she tell me of the way she spent her morning? Heavens! How I hope that she at least will not lie. Then I might believe that they met only by chance. But his falsehood remains. Well, he will explain it to me."

It was on this hope that Alyette alighted from the carriage at the palace in which, for a hundred and fifty years, the modern heirs of the savage clan of Durlock, so feared formerly on the frontier, and from which Montrose had drawn his most ferocious followers, had resided. Everything in this beautiful dwelling of the eighteenth century revealed one of those *quasi*-royal receptions which are given once during the season, in London so democratic throughout the year, so intensely aristocratic during two months. The line of carriages drawn up before the entrance, the crowd of footmen who waited upon the steps and in the antechamber, the many serv-

ants in livery and powder, who announced the guests, the sumptuousness of the rooms, hung with pictures of old masters, through which they passed to reach the garden, proclaimed the elegance of this function, which was framed by the scenery of a veritable park, an oasis of trees and green sward. Musicians filled the garden with gay music, and on the thick, soft grass promenaded the lovely goddesses of the Britannic Olympus, in which there are so many beautiful beings. There was a profusion of bright-colored gowns, of batistes, delicate silks, and this prodigality of luxury was enhanced by the opulence of the jewels which the women, who were almost all tall and stately, wore in full day. Necklaces of pearls encircled their necks; large turquoise buttoned their light blouses; diamonds, rubies, sapphires pinned their hats. As there is always something of utility in English pleasures, even garden parties, the tables on the

veranda were covered with pieces of stuff, homespun, as it is called in the village in the Highlands where Lady Durlock had her hunting-lodge. The pretty Countess, who, dressed in white, received the guests, with her bright smiles and her beautiful blue eyes, had organized this exposition in order to encourage by her influence the local industry; so, below on the lawn, beside the tent in which the orchestra played, three old peasants, who had come from Scotland, wove this coarse material.

Mme. de Lautrec was no longer in ecstacy, as she had been some hours before, in the presence of this example of social duty. In the picturesque jumble of the hundred guests, men and women, who drank tea, handled the homespun, looked curiously at the old Scotch weavers, and walked to and fro listening to the music and breathing the fresh air beneath the trees, the Marquise saw only the face of Emmeline in animated conversation, and, as al-

ways, charming, adorable and almost childlike in her gaiety. She was conversing with one of the ministers of the Cabinet then in power, the eldest son of a duke, a young man of about thirty-four, who replied to her phlegmatically:

"No, Madame, I assure you that there is no advantage in being a peer, and I will be twice sorry when I am obliged to enter the Upper Chamber. First, because I shall have lost my father, and then because I will be obliged to quit the House of Commons, where there are real fights."

"It is surprising," said Emmeline, some minutes later to Mme. de Lautrec, when the latter joined her, "they amuse themselves like our young French people and even more gaily, and they take as much pleasure in politics as though they formed a part of a life of pleasure. I said this but now to your friend, D'Aydie, to make him ashamed of his laziness."

"Is he here?" asked Alyette, and

she thought: "No, there cannot be any intrigue between them. She would not look thus when she mentioned his name; she would not dare to tease me, or speak of him. But will she tell me of their walk?"

"He has gone," replied Emmeline. "He doubtless thought you did not intend to come." She added, thoughtfully: "I think I was wrong to advise you to be amiable toward him. I fear he entertains a sentiment entirely serious. If you had but seen him this morning when I met him strolling alone in Kensington Gardens. He looked for all the world like an unhappy lover."

As she said this she laughed, while looking through her half-closed eyes at her friend, who drank in every word she uttered. This teasing was carried on so naturally, so artlessly; there was so much simplicity in this allusion to the tête-à-tête that had so greatly tormented her that the poor dreamer seemed to have been delivered from a nightmare. The

thought of this walk succeeding the visit to the picture gallery, which all the afternoon had appeared very unlikely on account of the distance, now became not only plausible, but evident.

The calm was not, however, to last. New evidence came to dissipate her confidence which Emmeline had so adroitly managed to inspire. While the two friends talked a person approached them, causing Mme. de Sarlève to exclaim:

"Here comes my husband; I will leave you together and return home. I have been out since eleven o'clock this morning, and it is certainly time for me to take a rest, as there is for this evening a grand dinner, to be followed by a ball. One fine morning, should I continue to reside in London, I would wake up dead."

"She says this," said Alyette to De Sarlève, when they were alone, "and yet it is her true life. She is very full of go."

"And you, too, Madame," said De

Sarlève. "It seems to me that you are in the harness. Yes, you are at all the fêtes. You are here now, and you dine with us at Roland Barrett's I suppose?"

"No," she replied; "I dine at home with my husband."

"You are going to-morrow to Semley Manor with Emmeline?" he continued.

What made Alyette think that while asking this simple question the husband of her friend had in his eyes a look of malicious inquiry? She had never had much sympathy for De Sarlève, with his rude manners, his green, bloodshot eyes, and his muddy-looking complexion. At this moment it seemed to her as though the curl of his lips expressed a cruel grin. It was but a second, and then she replied:

"Certainly; and you, also, I suppose?"

"No," he replied; "I had already made an engagement with a friend

to go and look at some horses day after to-morrow."

Then in a voice seemingly indifferent, and with an absent manner, but with the same unpleasant expression:

"D'Aydie will be of the party, so Emmeline says." As Mme. de Lautrec did not reply, he added: "It was you who presented him to Lady Semley, I believe?"

"Yes," she replied. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing. I simply asked to learn how he came to know her," said De Sarlève.

His green eyes no longer tore the face of the young woman. He appeared entirely absorbed in the coming and going of the needles of the homespun weavers, and, changing the subject, he said:

"Have you observed how quickly and accurately they work? It is very curious."

He took a few steps around the spinners, and Alyette followed him mechanically, but two ideas wound-

ed her heart. The first was that in asking her to present Bertrand to Lady Semley, Emmeline desired to have the young man invited without her husband, and also to throw upon Alyette the responsibility of the invitation. The second was that De Sarlève himself suspected a hidden *liaison* between Emmeline and Bertrand. And she knew not which of these two ideas wounded her the most.

IV

From Saturday to Monday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CHAPTER IV.

From Saturday to Monday.

Among the original pictures London presents without ceasing for the idle amusement of the French traveler, nothing is more odd perhaps than the great railway stations between five and six o'clock on Saturdays during the season. All English society is there, seen hurrying to and fro on the platforms on the way to pay visits from sixty to a hundred miles from London at some one of the innumerable châteaux, lodges, houses, abbeys and manors of the neighboring shires. In the crowd at the Paddington Station the next day were two guests of Lady Semley's party, Lord Helston and Bertrand d'Aydie. For twenty-four hours the innocent roué—far more innocent under the

circumstance than artful—had not dared to appear before Alyette de Lautrec. He had waited to see her with an almost feverish impatience, which should have made Emmeline reflect on the danger of having a screen-friend. The half attention he consequently paid his companion's remarks sufficed, however, for Lord Helston, who was profoundly happy in having cornered a Parisian. He was one of those great British lords who spend their immense revenues in seeing all that there is to be seen in this lower world, every country and all peoples.

Helston had talked with Napoleon III., Pope Pius IX., Garibaldi, Gambetta, Bismarck, Wagner, General Boulanger, the Emperor Menelek, Longfellow, and Dom Pedro. Whom had he not seen and known among the notable men of his time? He had lived in India, China, Japan and in North and South America. He had served in the first part of the Franco-German war on the staff of the

Prince Royal, and, in the siege of Paris, on that of General Trochu. His phlegmatic temperament could be stirred only by excitement. He was a man of about sixty years of age, very slight, and with a thin face, closely shaven. He looked scarcely fifty. He conversed well, but he knew too much. He said to Bertrand:

"You are going to see a true sample of English life, my dear Monsieur d'Aydie, here in this carriage."

As he spoke, he pointed to the first-class coach which Lady Semley had had reserved for her guests.

"In Lady Helston, my wife, you have a very good type of the political life of this country. You know, I suppose, that she is a socialist? Of course, a very rose-water sort of socialism. You say that, do you not? We say milk and water. The French are more artistic than we are; yes, even in their proverbs."

While saying this an indefinable smile, full of insolent condescen-

sion, curled his lips, a condescension peculiar to the vain islanders when they compliment a stranger.

"All the same," he continued, "at the last elections she dislodged the Conservative candidate. In Sir John Rigg you have a fine example of the true sportsman of our country. You have not met him? No? He is captain of the Blues, but he passes six months out of the twelve in Africa hunting wild beasts. He holds the record for lion killing. He has, I believe, killed as many as fifty-two. Lord Kilpatrick, the old judge, will also be there. He is a specimen of English piety, and is one of three or four partisans of what is called High Church, who wish to make themselves heard at Rome. He is rather too fond of old port wine. That is his only fault. You will meet the Roland Barretts, the yacht people, Lady Ardrahan and her daughter, the horsewomen. Politics, religion, hunting, yachting and riding will be well represented, and if

you will allow me to include myself, the journey embraces all England. But here are all our people arriving at once. Come, let us assist the ladies."

The different personages enumerated by the polygot and dilettante lord arrived with great hampers and trunks carried by porters. Little boys went to and fro before them, carrying baskets, newspapers, magazines, fruits, great bunches of hot house grapes, and large strawberries. An atmosphere of steam and smoke enveloped the scene of departure. Everybody crossed the platform at will, hurrying toward the trains that were ready to depart on the five or six tracks. Every five minutes one of the uniformed employees raised a flag, a guard whistled, and a train moved out quickly, to be replaced in a minute by another train. Many times afterward D'Aydie was destined to see, in imagination, this panorama of mechanical activity, rendering more gracious by its bru-

tal contrast the picture of the two women who occupied such a place in his sentimental life. Mme. de Sarliève, so fresh and young in her toilet of green cloth, addressed him as soon as she saw him with a smile in which there was a little air of mystery, of avowal, of prudence, and of pride. He saw this smile, and he was touched, but not the less by the pallor of the face of the other, the reserve and modesty of Alyette, whose face was rendered even more pale by the grayish hue of her gown and the lassitude provoked by sleeplessness. He needed nothing further to tell him that Mme. de Lautrec had detected his lie of the previous day, and that because of this deception, she had suspected the truth. He experienced a sense of shame at the thought that, if this truth pained her, it proved beyond a doubt that he was not indifferent to her. The secret emotion called forth in him by this sudden evidence that he interested so forcibly the pious Mar-

quise filled him with fear. Linked as he was with Emmeline, he realized that he had inspired in the other a profound sentiment, notwithstanding the game he had played. It has already been said too often that he was a lover of love, and it is certain that in installing himself on one of the seats in the compartment Mme. de Lautrec had entered, all prudent calculations were banished from his thoughts. He would have preferred to be alone with her, to have spoken to her, to have explained, in order to have obtained from her eyes a look less severe and distant. But did not her enforced coldness betray sadness very flattering to the *amour propre* of the young man? He thus forgot to observe other eyes, those of Emmeline, which, at first, radiant with tender gaiety, became clouded and more and more saddened, as the visible preoccupation of D'Aydie for the pale, nervous Alyette grew apparent. Meanwhile, the train rolled

on rapidly, stopping only at Reading, Oxford and Banbury.

The big Kilpatrick, the old Scotch judge, tried to entertain, in bad French, Mme. de Lautrec, knowing her to be a good Catholic, by stories of the Oxford movement. But the names of Pusey, Ward and their contemporaries were enigmas to the charming woman. She was longing to know the truth respecting Emmeline and Bertrand, but while her mind was busy with her own thoughts, she appeared to listen to the old judge.

"You will see a very fine collection of beasts at Semley Manor," Sir John Rigg was saying to Mme. De Sarliève, who found a way to pay attention to the hunter without ceasing to watch either Alyette or D'Aydie. "Semley was at one time the best gun in England."

During this and other idle conversation, the train rushed on with bewildering speed, and at length reached Banbury. The coach was there

detached from the express and switched to a branch road, whence it wended its way through the most picturesque and verdant country to the little Northamptonshire Station near Semley Manor. For the second time D'Aydie realized that he was in danger of becoming really in love with Alyette, who remained still ensconced in a corner of the carriage, in appearance indifferent, but in reality greatly overcome by all that she was compelled to acknowledge to herself, when, on arriving at the station, she saw Emmeline take D'Aydie aside and speak to him excitedly.

"What is she saying to him? Oh, I know that I cannot endure to see them speak thus. Great heavens, how terrible; I am jealous."

"Listen, Bertrand," began Mme. de Sarliève, "do not look at Alyette again as you have been doing. I cannot endure it."

"But you know very well," he replied, with an embarrassment that did not escape the searching glance

of the Countess, "that I am only afraid that she may suspect something."

"Ah, if that were true," she exclaimed, with growing passion, repeating aloud the words the other had uttered in a low tone. "I am becoming jealous," she said, with humor. "You must come in the carriage with me, and you also, De Lautrec," calling to the husband of her suspected rival, so as to be sure that this rival, according to the great law of separations of households, would take a place in one of the other victorias. This prudent ruse having succeeded, the amiable woman was very gay during the half hour which the procession of carriages sent by Lady Semley took to reach the manor, a great, square, red building, built in the style of the Tudors, surrounded by thick foliage and luxuriant creeping vines, for which the English have such a fondness. The guests thus made their way toward the peaceful château, which could

be seen at the extremity of a long avenue of flowering linden trees, the perfume of which pervaded the air. The one most greatly touched by this ancient magnificence was Antoine de Lautrec, who exclaimed:

"If France had not had her Revolution, we, too, should have our châteaux. It is true," he added, sighing, "that the châtelaine of this castle is a converted Jewess; the daughter of a banker of Hamburg; did you know that?"

"Why not?" replied Emmeline, gaily, who now, perfectly happy, was inhaling the voluptuous perfume of the lindens. "Certainly she is a Jewess," she continued, regardless of the feelings of poor De Lautrec, who professed the anti-semitic prejudices of a great lord of today. Too well-bred to be fanatical, however, he permitted himself to accept more than one invitation out of three to certain houses. "I forget who quoted to me the other day the following words by Lord Beaconsfield:

'Jews in a country are like lobsters in the stomach, excellent, provided one can digest them.' Do you think that funny? My interlocutor then added: 'The English digest all foreigners, Jews and Americans, Germans and Italians, and out of them lead a very nice life. Why do you not do the same in France with your Israelites?' And he was right."

"Besides," said Bertrand, "without Lady Semley's money the château would probably be in ruins; what a pity! Hush! Here she is."

The slight and delicate object of these remarks stood upon the steps of the noble old building, of which her fortune and marriage had made her the châtelaine. She was a woman of about forty years of age, with magnificent black eyes which seem to burn with an interior flame in a long, hollow face that betrayed its Oriental origin. Her father, a small shopkeeper of Hamburg, suddenly became very rich, no one knew how. When he died he

left twenty millions, and was the father-in-law of an English lord. Her profile contrasted with the building and scenery almost as much as with the Anglo-Norman physiognomy of Semley, whose long teeth, red whiskers and pimpled skin reminded one of the caricatures of the "milord" in the old vaudevilles. The first aspect of this house awaiting its guests seemed to justify the opinion of De Lautrec, for he whispered to Emmeline as he assisted her from the carriage:

"You can say what you please, she is not to the manner born."

But it was sufficient to have passed the threshold of the door, above which was sculptured the motto of the Semleys: *Perseverando,* to realize that the astonishing intelligence and marvelous adaptability of the Israelite race had made of this suffering and fragile creature a proper guardian for the rare treasures amassed in this antique residence by a long line of nobles. She

had consecrated the enormous fortune inherited from her father to save from destruction and dispersion the innumerable relics of one hundred years of aristocracy. The chief of the Semleys figures in that celebrated "book of judgment" in which William the Conqueror surveyed and established the value of all his vast kingdom. Everywhere in the hall where lions, tigers and deer killed by the hunter were placed below ancestral portraits painted by Holbein, Titian, Van Dyck; in the corridors where hung tapestries brought from Flanders at the time of the wars of Marlborough; in the dining-room hung with Cordova leather, ordered in Spain by a Semley, once ambassador to Philippe II.; in the drawing-rooms where a Raphael was encircled by *chefs d'œuvres* by Reynolds, Romney, Gainsborough and Lawrence, one could trace the generations that had persevered for nine hundred years, and the poor little Jewess, heiress of a proscribed and

persecuted race, assimilated herself to this opulent tradition until she seemed part of it. By a miracle of will, this daughter of an Eastern tribe was so identified with the place and its works of art that, when displaying them, her thin face became almost English. She presented, according to Lord Beaconsfield and many others, a striking proof of what the astonishing British middle classes can accomplish upon destiny. Superficial as were Bertrand d'Aydie and Mme. de Sarlève in character, and although occupied by their own personal heart interests, they could not help being struck by this singularity which recalled the comparison of the author of "Lothair."

"Well, is the lobster sufficiently digested?" said Emmeline. She had perpetrated this pleasantry when only a few steps from her chamber before dressing for dinner, and, throwing from her finger tips a kiss to Alyette, she added: "Antoine will

explain that joke, and you will laugh."

"How could Emmeline think for a moment that I would find wit in such vulgar nonsense?" thought Mme. de Lautrec, with an annoyance not even disguised when her husband explained in a few words this malicious culinary freak of the ironical "Dizzy," as the faithful still call the admirable Disraëli. They were standing in a little boudoir which separated the two bedrooms. The unfortunate De Lautrec, who, during the past thirty-six hours had mentally attributed the nervousness of his wife to his own awkward speech in regard to D'Aydie and Mme. de Sarliève, thought himself sufficiently clever to revert to the subject on their drive from the station to the château.

"It is not unusual, but nevertheless Emmeline seems particularly gay to-day. She is amused with all and everything, like a child. You certainly had reason yesterday to

defend her against my evil thoughts. I have watched them both, and there is nothing between them, absolutely nothing; I would vouch for it now."

Alyette did not reply, but she frowned slightly, and the speaker saw that he had made another mistake when his wife passed hurriedly into her chamber.

"What have I said now to displease her?" he thought. "One would think that she was absolutely furious at my good opinion of Emmeline."

This time the husband judged rightly, but how was it possible for him to comprehend the odd thoughts and feelings of a jealous woman, who had protected by her presence the journey of the two lovers seated face to face with each other? She had endured, during that half hour, bitter suffering, a suffering without parallel, and while her maid arranged her hair and dressed her for dinner, the first bell having rung, varied thoughts entered her brain,

wounding her heart as though it had been pierced by fine needles, broken, one after another, in the wound.

At dinner Bertrand contrived to be seated beside Emmeline; this was still another torture. In vain Ronald Barrett, the yachtsman, who was seated beside her, was prodigal in anecdote regarding the regattas at Cowes and the cruising-parties, one of which had been nothing less than a veritable expedition to the North Pole. Later on, when the women had returned to the drawing-room, leaving the men to drink and smoke, in vain Lady Ardrahan, Lady Helston and Lady Semley, in turn, sought to interest her, one in the hunts in which she had taken part the past winter, the second in episodes of the socialistic meetings she attended, and the third in the history of the three handsomest Reynolds in the drawing-room,which were sold by the former Lord Semley, and which she had sought for everywhere and finally found in the

United States and re-purchased. In vain, also, Emmeline de Sarliève, who was slightly troubled by this visible anxiety, approached her for a moment, and with a well-assumed simplicity which might have disarmed all suspicion, said:

"What is the matter, Alyette? You seem so strange this evening, so unlike yourself."

"I?" replied Mme. de Lautrec, while she lowered her quivering eyelids. "There is nothing the matter. I have doubtless caught a slight cold. A good night and it will be gone."

"There is nothing the matter?" repeated Emmeline, adding, coaxingly: "You are not annoyed with me?"

"With you?" replied Alyette, rising. "What do you suppose I could have against you?"

"Bertrand was right," thought Emmeline; "she has not perhaps realized the truth, but she suspects."

"This time I realize more fully than ever that she has lied to me," murmured Alyette, "and yet can it

be possible? If I only had one proof, only one proof; at least, I would be satisfied. This uncertainty renders me so wretched."

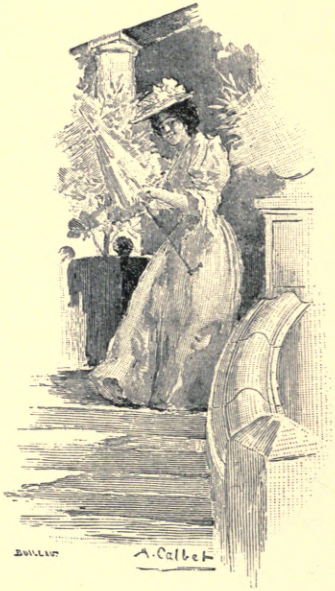
The proof which the jealousy of the unconscious love of Alyette implored, chance was about to afford her that very night, and it would also reveal to her the hold that the discreet lover of her cunning friend had taken upon her soul. Until then she not only doubted a *liaison* between Emmeline and D'Aydie, but her own passion for the young man, who had led her for some months to play the equivocal rôle of a screen for his love. The darkness of her surroundings and her own heart was destined to be lighted up suddenly.

Near one o'clock, not being able to sleep, she thought to while away the time by reading a book, the words of which, however, she forgot as soon as read. Suddenly she thought she heard footsteps in the hall, and that the steps halted before her door. She sprang from her bed instinctively,

and with the precaution of the guilty, she, the innocent, turned the key in the door, opening it noiselessly and slowly, but sufficiently to enable her to see a furtive form glide softly within the opening of another doorway. It was the silhouette of Bertrand d'Aydie, and the door through which he passed was that of Emmeline de Sarlève.

V

Two Friends


A. Calbet

CHAPTER V.

Two Friends.

In the sudden substitution of absolute proof for certain suspicions there is something both heart-rending and irreparable. The soul feels the same shock as does the flesh at the contact of the steel that mutilates it; that murderous cold of the blade that seems about to penetrate to the centre of our being, to that vital spot which we call life. All jealous people have experienced this frightful feeling when, after many days or sometimes years and after much torturing doubt, they have at last acquired unquestioning proof of suspected treachery.

To this chilling and mortal sorrow was, in the case of Alyette de Lautrec, added another. Unconsciously the woman had become suddenly

jealous to the point of pain by the most casual revelation. She was also a woman of absolute purity. Brought up in the most sincere piety, her imagination, as chaste as it was romantic, had never allowed itself, since her entrance into society, to be as much as grazed by anything unhealthy. Her women friends who knew her to be almost a prude, by tacit consent never indulged before her in those risqué conversations which, while they do not render a woman less virtuous, certainly rub off a little of the bloom of innocence by initiating one, if only in thought, in the guilty disorders of the senses. For Alyette, whose marriage had been one of interest only, the universe of passionate love remained a mystery that she had scarcely attempted to fathom, and it was owing to this virginity of soul, preserved by her after marriage, that she had found charm in the constant reserve of Bertrand d'Aydie in his relations with her. The seducer had gradu-

ally tamed her natural modesty by treating her with respect. Attentions paid her behind which she had not only perceived but even suspected the most vague appearance of desire, would have provoked in her an immediate recoil and revolt.

She had thus formed of the young man this picture naively idealized, which alone permits the birth of love in women like her whose unhealthy delicacy revolts against exact knowledge of character and who only accept the realities of life by ignoring them. These dreamers only take pleasure in an indistinct and partial vision of things and men. Are they wrong? When you smell a rose in a bouquet are you not glad that it is separated from its roots, from the damp and black soil, from the dirt in which it grew? These beautiful and timid natures reason the same way with life. They are tender and chimerical and when a brutal incident no longer permits the lie of their illusion, when they are com-

pelled to see things and men in a way that is often crude and vulgar they are seized with unbearable anguish. And in this anguish there is everything, the humiliating impression of having been duped, the crumbling of a pretty château of dreams, in which they had taken refuge. There is, more especially, something akin to a contagion of disgrace. Certain secrets once discovered soil the mind where they are deposited. What we know of shameful things in a sense forms part of ourselves and our indignation against certain images defiles the mind, by forcing us to contemplate them and feel them in a sinister way, hideously real. Alyette was intended never to cease being virtue and goodness in the form of woman, but she could never forget that half-lighted corridor of the country house, that silence of the night, that mystery where everything pointed to danger, the young man hastening to his rendezvous, doubly criminal since the lover be-

trayed the confidence of a man whose hand he grasped, Emmeline's husband—since he betrayed her own (Alyette's) confidence, to whom his attitude had made her think that he loved her.

The night that followed this discovery was a frightful ordeal for Alyette de Lautrec. When she saw Bertrand disappear through the door of Mme. de Sarlève's chamber she was seized with a violent trembling and was obliged to seat herself, not having the strength to close the door. "He is her lover, her lover," she repeated again and again. Completely overcome by her emotion and blinded by her tears, she crept to her bed, and, throwing herself upon it, exclaimed, through sobs:

"How they have lied to me! How they have lied to me!"

The frightful night, during each hour of which she heard every movement of the pendulum of the clock, and the least sound that broke the stillness, finally passed. Morning

came, and she must again meet Emmeline. She must listen to her familiar speech; she must meet her without embarrassment, and must permit her to kiss her as usual! The mere thought of this kiss was intolerable to the pure, honest woman to such a degree that she cried aloud: "That? No; never, never!"

And he, Bertrand; she must meet him again and once more submit to the abominable perfidy of his gaze, which had always been so tender. He would envelop her with that mute contemplation, by which, secretly, and almost without being aware of it, she had been deceived.

She suffered from his treason because, she now realized, she loved him! The discovery overwhelmed her with remorse and anguish.

Realizing that, moved by such feelings, she could not in the presence of Emmeline and Bertrand preserve the only attitude consonant with her dignity, she determined to remain in her room throughout the day with

the curtains of her window lowered, pleading a headache as a reason why she could receive no one. There, alone in her chamber, she implored God to grant her the strength to bear this cross, or in any case, to do her duty. It was Sunday. They had been told the night before that a carriage would take Emmeline and herself to the Catholic church, which was situated some miles distant from the Manor; but to go to church thus accompanied, Alyette had not the strength. To have attended mass would have been a real help to her, but to listen to the service with that woman beside her was impossible for her.

When De Lautrec, whom Alyette had commissioned to make her excuses for her absence, appeared at breakfast, there were in the dining-room only Mme. de Sarliève and D'Aydie. Their feverish gaiety suddenly ceased when the new arrival said to them:

"Poor Alyette is not well. She has

one of those bad sick-headaches from which she suffers so much. I do not think she will be able to quit her room to-day."

"And I did not go and kiss her this morning, thinking to let her sleep," said Emmeline. "I will go at once and keep her company."

"I thank you for her for the kind thought," said De Lautrec, "but she told me that she would receive no one. She wishes, if possible, to sleep."

"Does not this sudden indisposition render you anxious?" asked Bertrand of Emmeline, later, when breakfast was finished and they found themselves again tête-à-tête in the park and turned to look at the closed windows of Alyette's room.

"Why should it?" said Mme. de Sarlève. "Alyette is delicate, and these fifteen days in London have fatigued her; that is all. What else could be the matter?"

"I do not know," replied Bertrand. "It seems to me that, in speaking to

you, De Lautrec was somewhat embarrassed, as though his wife had insisted that she was unwilling to receive you particularly."

"Me!" exclaimed Emmeline, "for what reason?"

"Well," replied the young man, with hesitation, blushing slightly, "if she knew all, if by chance she surprised our rendezvous last night—"

He looked about him anxiously as he said this, as though alarmed by the glance his companion fixed upon him.

"Oh, well," said Emmeline, after a short silence; "suppose she did; it is I who would be affected by that. I, and not you—unless," she continued in a singularly deep tone of voice, "there is something between you which I do not suspect."

"Between her and me?" interrupted D'Aydie, quickly. "You know very well that Mme. de Lautrec is above suspicion. You know how proud she is, how pure she is, and

how I respect her—but what is the matter with you?"

"The matter with me?" said Emmeline, her cheeks flushed, in turn. "I admire the delicacy with which you make me feel the distance you place between her and me. Why is she proud? Why is she pure? Why is she respected by you? Simply because she is incapable of the courage of her sentiments and of making any sacrifices for love, as I have done. Ah, I see clearly now. There is a spirit of coquetry in the saint, and she is in a good way to steal your heart from me. If this is not true, why do you tremble at the mere thought that she knows of our love?"

"My dear, how unjust you have become to your poor friend," he replied, in a soft voice, in which there was the touch of a caress. He was not playing a part at this moment. He felt that she suffered, and he pitied her; moreover, he did not wish her to know that there was a

basis of truth in her words. "Can you not understand," he continued, persuasively, "that in all this I see only you—I think only of you, and I say to myself, 'If Mme. de Lautrec has surprised our secret, she will not protect our love as she has done heretofore?' Your husband is already jealous. You have acknowledged this yourself. You found his manner peculiar when he inquired day before yesterday where you had passed the morning. As to myself, I have always held the opinion that De Lautrec told him about our promenade in the park. If we do not see each other any more at Alyette's, when and where are we to meet? This is what torments me. You will understand now why I have reason to wish that she may not suspect."

"How good you are to have spoken to me thus," she replied, her suspicions laid at rest for the time. "Your words are a comfort to me. Let come what will, so that you love me, nothing can happen to mar my happiness

while I have your love. This afternoon the siege will be raised and I shall see Alyette. I shall know what to say to her, I promise you, else my name is no longer Emmeline."

Emmeline was destined to lose confidence in herself because of the persistency of Mme. de Lautrec, who refused to receive her—a refusal repeated three times. How was it possible not to recognize in this refusal a resolution to be explained only in a knowledge of a recent event? What event? What circumstance could exercise such an influence if not that which Bertrand had suggested as possible, namely, that Alyette had discovered their nocturnal rendezvous? Emmeline was too intelligent and had too just an appreciation of her position not to perceive the perilous consequences which might follow upon such a discovery. She knew Mme. de Lautrec to be incapable of betraying the terrible secret, but she also knew her to be incapable of voluntarily screening such an ad-

venture. Besides, she had suspected for some time that her friend had not remained entirely insensible to the respectful adoration so traitorously bestowed upon her by D'Aydie. Under these conditions, this discovery would result in a certain rupture between the two women. How was she to explain this change in their friendship to De Sarliève? What could she invent to justify a quarrel with her most intimate friend? How, also, was she to continue her *liaison* with Bertrand without the unconscious co-operation of the screen-friend? Her uneasiness was heightened when, on the following morning, she heard De Lautrec say:

"Alyette is still so greatly fatigued that it will be impossible for her to go by the noon train."

"I begin to think you have guessed rightly," she said to D'Aydie when they were seated, side by side, in the return train. "Evidently she did not wish to take the same train with us."

"What can we do?" asked the

young man, with an anxious look in his eyes that called forth this reply:

"I am for frankness. I will play my cards openly. If she knows that you are my lover she will accept you as such, or I shall never see her again."

"And your husband?"

"That is my affair," she replied, gazing at him with a penetrating glance. "Do not fail me," she added. "If I have you, I have all I ask."

When she left the train at Paddington Station, her course was planned. There must be a definite explanation with Mme. de Lautrec. She had determined to learn beyond a doubt if she had, or had not, reason to fear that Alyette would take her lover from her.

The explanation which she desired, and which she hoped to bring about speedily, owing to the proximity of their rooms in the hotel, did not take place until Tuesday at noon, more than twenty-four hours after the return of Alyette, who until

then could not find courage to meet her perfidious friend. When Emmeline entered the little boudoir on the first floor occupied by her whom she now named only her rival, she realized that she was about to enter upon a difficult struggle. She had prepared for an interview which she realized fully would be either for "peace or for war." She anticipated at first a scene of indignation and lofty virtue, and she was surprised and disconcerted when she entered to find, half extended upon a reclining chair, a woman overcome by suffering, her face deathly pale, and her eyes drooping and full of weariness, who greeted her with a forced smile and acted as though she knew nothing. That she in reality knew all Emmeline read in her eyes and in her effort to smile, in her colorless lips, from which she had expected reproach. Although she understood that Mme. de Lautrec did not desire to speak of what she had discovered, and after two or three words had

been spoken she looked at Mme. de Lautrec fixedly and said, abruptly:

"You love me but little?"

"I?" said Alyette, her eyelids trembling with repressed feeling. She understood that her companion was about to impose upon her the explanation she had hoped to avoid.

"Yes, you," continued Emmeline, "since you can cherish in your heart what is now there. Do you think I have not understood since Sunday that you do not wish to see me, that your sickness was assumed, and that the reason—shall I tell you? Shall I?"

"If you know it," said Mme. de Lautrec, in a faint voice, after a moment of terrible silence. She was incapable of uttering a lie, and although this brutal attack pained her greatly, she repeated the words, "If you know, you should also know that I have loved you dearly and that I give you a sure proof in imploring you to be silent. I may de-

sire to ignore certain things. Knowing them, I could not accept them—"

"I, on the contrary, will not be silent," interrupted Emmeline. "I cannot submit to be treated thus by a real friend such as you. It is true," she continued, with heat, "I have a lover. You have suspected us; you have spied upon us. Let me speak," she insisted, as Alyette made a gesture of denial. "In any case, you surprised us. You have my secret. You now know me fully, with all that the prejudice of the world applies to my fault; with what I call my great happiness and my pride. If you can accept me thus, tell me frankly. You owe this to our friendship."

"Do not speak of our friendship," said Alyette, who by the words of the excited woman had been wounded deeply. "As for the rest, I am not your judge, but that—, yes, that is the saddest part of all,—I was your friend. I placed in you a tender and entire confidence, full of devotion. What have you done with that confi-

dence? Do you think I have forgotten all that you said to me, and that I do not now understand the duplicity practiced upon me? What part did you play with that friendship? What comedy did you both play around me, a comedy that would have continued if chance had not made everything known to me? It is frightful; it is frightful!"

As she spoke, tears gathered in her eyes and fell upon her cheeks. Her reproach had been so touching that Emmeline instinctively, by a caressing gesture, took her handkerchief to wipe the tears away, saying:

"Do not weep, I implore you not to weep."

Mme. de Lautrec was seated, but she arose suddenly, with a gesture full of aversion, which did not escape her friend. The perfume with which the little square of cambric was impregnated was exquisitely delicate, and it was that which Emmeline used always. It was a voluptuous mingling of perfumes, and seemed

to exhale the sensual influence of the living flower of love and youth which was realized in the beautiful woman. Alyette remembered that with this delicious aroma the kisses of D'Aydie had mingled, and in her movement Emmeline read her thoughts.

"I fill you with horror," she said; then, after a moment of hesitation, she said, her eyes full of passionate light and her voice trembling with curiosity and cruelty: "Acknowledge, then, that you love him, too!"

She checked herself. The pallor of Alyette had become livid. Emmeline saw, with astonishment, that, pressing her hands against her heart as though it had been pierced by an insupportable pain, she leaned against the table for support, that she might not fall. It was but the weakness of a moment, and Mme. de Lautrec, reseating herself, said:

"Be silent and go, I implore you; I command you. Go—yet no, I still implore you. If you have ever been

my friend, go. Another time we shall speak of this. I will be more calm. I will do what I can that no one may suspect that which has transpired between us. At this moment this scene is too painful for me." Then, with a sudden outburst, she uttered a cry, "Unhappy woman, go, leave me. Go! Do you not see that you are killing me?"

Her small hands were clasped convulsively and again pressed to her bosom as though to still the throbbing of her heart. Her every action expressed her grief, and she was so visibly at the end of her strength, and so completely did the troubled soul implore pity for the bleeding wound within her heart, that, despite herself, Emmeline obeyed. She beheld her work and that of Bertrand, and for the first time she was filled with fear.

VI

The Unexpected


A. Calbet

CHAPTER VI.

The Unexpected.

The pity of a woman for the passion of a rival never lasts very long. It is not only statesmen who practice the immoral but wise maxim, "*Beati possidentes.*" If, then, Mme. de Lautrec had experienced this sudden impulse of remorse in the presence of the martyrdom of Alyette, she soon returned to the consideration of self; she concluded, first, that the material difficulties of her position would be less formidable than she had thought; in the next place, she realized that, at all costs, she must prevent Bertrand from divining the deep love he had inspired in Mme. de Lautrec.

"She will not make a scandal," she said to herself, after mature reflection in her drawing-room, be-

low which, at this instant, her victim sobbed. "As to him, it will be somewhat difficult to hide the truth. But I shall find a way."

Half an hour passed, during which she was plunged in thought, her face pressed close to the window pane, gazing without, yet seeing nothing. Suddenly the door of the room was thrown open, and she started like a person awakened from a deep sleep.

"Ah, is that you, Guy?" she exclaimed, recognizing her husband. "You startled me."

"You were so completely absorbed just now," replied De Sarliève, "that you did not see me pass on the sidewalk. Are you expecting any one?"

He said this in a peculiar tone. His wife looked at him. She saw at a glance, she who knew him so well, that he was a prey to an extraordinary excitement. She saw that he held in his hand an envelope, the shape and paper of which she recognized even before she had seen the address. The letter was from D'Aydie, the seal not

broken. The lovers ordinarily wrote but little, as they saw each other so often. When they did write, it was almost always freely. Until these last few days they had been sure of their surroundings, and therefore tranquil. Never had De Sarlève examined a single letter received by his wife. Emmeline understood instantly what had transpired. Bertrand, anxious to know how the interview between the two women had terminated, and not daring to call, fearing to meet Mme. de Lautrec, had sent her a letter, without suspecting that it would be intercepted. What did the note contain? In this uncertainty Emmeline felt herself tremble to the very roots of her pretty blond hair, while the expression of the face of her husband filled her with fear. De Sarlève was, as a rule, careless and indifferent, but when aroused was implacable and even savage in his anger, and the manner in which he handed his wife the letter alone

proved that it was difficult that he retained command of himself.

"Here is a letter for you, my dear," he said, with repressed passion. "I found it below just as they were going to bring it to you. As I was about to see you, I took charge of it."

"Thanks," replied Emmeline. As she spoke she took the envelope, and, without opening it, laid it upon the table near her, after glancing at the address. "It is nothing; only a word from Bertrand d'Aydie. I have plenty of time to read it. Have you the theatre box for this evening?"

"Yes," replied De Sarliève, "I have the box, but I beg that you will not disturb yourself for me. Read your letter."

"I have plenty of time," she said. "You will invite the Semleys, will you not?"

"I have told you to read your letter," replied the husband, without answering his wife's question.

"My letter," she said, with a light laugh. "Why this insistence?"

"Why?" replied the jealous man, in a tone full of cold determination, which contracted the heart of his listener, "because I wish to know what this D'Aydie has written. That is all." For an instant he was silent; then, striking the floor with his foot, he said: "I will not deceive you, Emmeline. There is in your relations with that man something I cannot understand, which troubles me and renders me anxious."

"What, you are jealous?" she had the courage to say. "You are jealous, and jealous of D'Aydie?"

She laughed loudly and shrugged her shoulders, but a cold perspiration, caused by fear, covered her. What would become of her and how was she to escape from opening the envelope? What if the note commenced, as was more than probable, with words of endearment?

"Well," he replied in a domineering tone, "admit that I am jealous and that this jealousy is ridiculous. You can easily end the matter, once

and for all. Open the letter and show it to me. I could have opened it myself, but I did not, because I do not consider that I have the right to inflict such an affront upon you. *I wish, however, to read that letter.* Do you hear? I am forced to read it in order to cast from me this frightful suspicion."

As he said this, he struck his breast with his closed fist so fiercely that Emmeline shuddered. She seemed to feel upon her shoulder and around her neck the clasp of the hard, square fingers of this man, for she was convinced that, if he knew the truth, he was capable of strangling her then and there. She was lost! It was impossible to destroy the letter. The very act would be an acknowledgment. Should she run the risk, hoping, after all, that the note would contain nothing to reveal the truth, and then say to her husband, "Read"? This bold thought entered her mind for a second, but she realized that such a course would

be impossible. Circumstanced as they were, Bertrand had certainly made some mention of the subject that occupied their thoughts. He had certainly mentioned the discovery of their intrigue. No; to run such a risk would be too terrible. Emmeline dared not.

Suddenly the thought of Alyette entered her mind. One last resource was open to her by which to gain time. In a flash she found a means. Bertrand must at all cost escape from his hotel and place some hours of reflection between himself and De Sarliève. This little woman, with her rosy cheeks and doll-like face of the eighteenth century, had also the astonishing boldness, presence of mind and intrepid cunning of that century. She had conceived the only possible manner by which she could assure the flight of Bertrand, so she turned to her husband and said:

"Suppose I am not willing to open this letter? What if I myself have not the right?" Then, with an effort

in which the anxiety evident was at least not assumed, she added: "If, in fact, it is not for me?"

"If it is not for you?" replied De Sarlève, in a tone of irony, in which repressed passion trembled. "There is, then, another Countess Guy de Sarlève in this hotel? You do not wish to read the letter? Then I will break the seal myself. You will bear witness that you forced me to do so."

As he spoke he extended his hand to take the letter. The courageous woman handed it to him calmly. It was the only way to make her husband hesitate and to gain time to speak to him. In a tone which no longer trembled she said:

"The letter is not for me." The words were spoken with decision. "It is addressed to me, but there is a certain sign which tells me that I am to deliver it to another with the seal unbroken. Do you not now understand? Why force me to betray a secret not mine?"

"Then," said De Sarliève, emphasizing his words, "you pretend that this letter bears an understood mark which permits you to recognize that it is not for you, but that you are to deliver it to another for whom it is intended? In other words, you lend your name to the complicity of an intrigue. This is a wrong toward me, for it is my name you bear." His irony became more bitter. "To say the least, I am entitled to know who the person is whose interests you serve through this sign, and also what he writes under cover to you."

"You compel me," interrupted Emmeline quickly, for she saw that he was about to break the seal. "The sign is the seal. The person to whom it is in reality addressed is—" then, in a low voice, as though ashamed of her treachery toward her friend, she added—"is Alyette."

De Sarliève gazed at her fixedly and then at the envelope. On the wax of the seal was the imprint of an antique stone given by the young

woman to her lover to use always in writing to her. It was simply a head, a profile with wings in the hair. The singularity of this emblem on the letter of the gay young Parisian gave the semblance of truth to the extraordinary lie. De Sarliève was literally stupefied. Eighty men out of a hundred would have said, in his place, that which he said to himself: "Such things are not invented; no one would dare to invent them." But this rough, heavy fellow had the logic of jealousy, the logic that demands proof, and he replied:

"Then you pretend to say that Alyette de Lautrec depends upon you to receive D'Aydie's letters? That means that she has an intrigue with him and that De Lautrec is jealous?"

"Yes," she said, in a voice scarcely sufficiently audible to utter the lie. "But what are you doing?" she added quickly.

"I am ringing the bell," he replied, "to know if she is at home."

That which Emmeline had deemed possible, without truly daring to hope for, was realized. Her husband was about to descend to Alyette's apartment and leave her some minutes for flight.

"Listen to me, Guy; you are mad. You cannot do this, you cannot do this!" she cried, throwing herself before him after the servant had returned with the reply that Mme. de Lautrec was in the hotel. "Open the letter rather than that; read the contents and then destroy it. Alyette will never know that you have read it. You will thus obtain your proof, and she cannot accuse me of having betrayed her."

"No," replied De Sarlève; "I will not commit such an outrage. I wish to know the truth, but without being dishonorable. You have said that this letter is for Mme. de Lautrec. I am going to see if you have lied. Since she makes use of my name I have the right to speak to her, and that right I propose to exercise."

"You have strength on your side," she said, as he forced the door open. After he had quitted the room, she ran to her bed chamber and placed in a little bag a handful of jewels and a bundle of bank notes. Then, without even taking time to tie her veil beneath her hat, she descended the staircase as fast as the remnant of strength left to her would permit. Having reached the square, she hailed a cab, giving the coachman the address of Bertrand d'Aydie's hotel. As the carriage rolled off she exclaimed:

"What an adventure! How rapidly catastrophe follows catastrophe."

As she said this she shuddered.

"Now he is questioning Alyette. In a few minutes more he will return to our rooms and will not find me. His first thought will be to seek D'Aydie. My God! grant that Bertrand may not have gone out. Time, time, to gain time is everything. At first Guy will think only of his vengeance. In twenty-four hours he will

think of the scandal. Oh, does Bertrand love me as much as he has said? I shall know. But what an adventure! And Alyette? Ah, well, Alyette is no doubt telling at this instant that the letter is not intended for her. She will tell all she knows; she will be avenged, and we shall be quits. I would, nevertheless, like to see them both face to face."

The immoral, but courageous, fugitive could not help smiling at the idea of the meeting between the two dupes. She seized in spite of herself the ludicrous side of the situation. She pictured the scene, without the least suspecting what was actually transpiring in Alyette's little drawing-room.

When Guy de Sarlève was announced Mme. de Lautrec was still overwhelmed by the emotions aroused by the cruel interview with Emmeline. The expression of De Sarlève's face as he entered with the letter in his hand at once aroused her fears for Bertrand, whose hand-

writing she recognized. De Sarlève said:

"You will excuse me, dear Madame, for disturbing you in spite of being aware that you are suffering. My apology is that I have a pressing message for you. I took it upon myself to deliver to you this letter in person."

"This letter?" she said, astonished. "This letter is not for me," were the words that rose to her lips. Her gaze, as she was about to utter them, fell upon De Sarlève. She divined with exactness the details of the explanation which had taken place between the husband and wife; she realized all with the quickened intelligence of a woman who loves. She felt that Emmeline's husband was furious on account of the letter, and, instinctively, she replied, while placing the letter upon the table, in a scarcely audible tone: "I thank you."

For an instant De Sarlève seemed to hesitate, as though belief was impossible; finally, in a voice full of

emotion and sadness, which touched Mme. de Lautrec deeply, he said:

"Then am I to understand that you acknowledge that this letter is for you? Oh, Madame, I know that I should not be here, and that my conduct toward you at this instant is not that of a gentleman. I know that if this letter is not written to you under the name of another, as has been *told me*, I merit disgrace for bringing it to you, and I am still at fault even if it is intended for you. My excuse is that I have been wretchedly unhappy for several days. It was imperative that I should know if the writer of this letter is in London on account of Mme. de Sarliève or yourself. I found this envelope on entering the hotel a short time since. As the address bore the name of my wife, I was at liberty to open the letter. I did not, however, do so. You can divine who it was who told me that the letter was for you, although directed to herself. If Emmeline has spoken the truth, your secret

will die here, but have pity on an unhappy man. In charity, if it be true, swear to me that this letter is indeed intended for you."

"I swear!" replied the young woman, after a short silence.

Mme. de Lautrec had taken a false oath, and what an oath! She had immolated her own honor for the sake of the young man who had been so false to her and for the friend who had deceived her. Her lips trembled and tears filled her eyes, but her distress seemed to De Sarliève a proof of her confusion. Was not her declaration that Bertrand d'Aydie's letter was intended for her a confession that her relations with him were very different from those which proclaimed her habitual attitude of reserve and scrupulousness? It was the revolt of her proud soul against the hypothesis which the circumstances led him to make.

"Even if the letter is for her," he had thought, "it is not certain that she will have the courage to acknowl-

edge it, and I shall then have the right to open it. If the letter is not for her, it is certain that she will show how insulted she is at such an accusation. In any case, I will have a positive result. I shall know."

He had not calculated upon Alyette being in love with D'Aydie in secret, passionately, madly in love, and through this love being willing to sacrifice everything when it was a question of saving the man she loved. When she had sworn there came upon De Sarlève's face a look of bewilderment, and his mental being was revolutionized.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, in perplexity and joy. The nightmare of his jealousy was dissipated. He no longer realized the odiousness of his conduct, and, with a gesture which contrasted oddly with his recent language, he took the hand of Alyette de Lautrec, who, in her wretchedness did not restrain him, and raising it

to his lips, imprinted on it a most respectful kiss, saying:

"Pardon me, Madame. If you but know what I have suffered until now—"

"I have nothing to pardon." She withdrew her hand and dismissed the one who had subjected her to so cruel an inquisition with such hauteur that, with bowed head, De Sarlève left the room like a guilty man; yet, by a singular feeling of contradiction, while he pitied, he believed this woman a hypocrite, and he did not doubt what she had told him. Still he felt remorse at his brutality, and this remorse redoubled when he reached the apartment of his wife, and found that Emmeline was not there.

"She has a horror of seeing me again," he thought, "and, after what I had done, she is right."

At this moment he heard outside the voice of Bertrand d'Aydie. What would this young man, whom he had suspected unjustly to be the lover of

his wife, think of him, Sarlièvе said to himself.

Bertrand had come direct from his hotel, at the door of which he had left Mme. de Sarlièvе. When she inquired for him he had a presentiment of some catastrophe. She had given him a feverish account of the letter having been intercepted by her husband, and her ruse in order to escape. The first impulse of Bertrand, in return for this confidence, was indignation. How was he to tell this woman, who had risked losing everything for his sake, that the thought of a suspicion being cast upon Alyette filled him with horror? And yet it was necessary to prevent the evil consequences of this guilty and gratuitous ruse.

"But in that letter," he exclaimed, "there was absolutely nothing. I did not even use a word of endearment. Oh, why did you not allow your husband to open the envelope? He would have accepted the contents as a proof of the innocence of our

friendship. You know that I have found him so odd of late that I should never have taken the risk of writing anything which might cause trouble."

"I was mad. I see it all," said Emmeline; "but what can be done?"

"To begin with," answered Bertrand, "he must not be allowed to suspect that we understood each other, and to accomplish this I must go at once and let him see me, without you, in order that he may not imagine the existence of a plot. I have a pretext, namely, to announce my departure. To leave London is necessary. To remain is no longer possible. It has become too dangerous. You will go and wait for me at the antiquary's, in New Bond Street, at the corner of Maddox, where we met a few days ago. In half an hour I will return to reassure you."

"And suppose you do not come?" she asked. "What if he should kill you? What if Alyette, to be revenged, should have betrayed us?"

"She!" he replied. "It is impossible! She may have said to De Sarlève that it was only a jest. She may have opened the letter. He would have seen but the most insignificant phrases. It will be for you, when you return, to tell him that you merely desired to prove to what extent his jealousy was capable. You will express your anger and indignation at his conduct, and it will be he who will ask forgiveness for his suspicions. Mme. de Lautrec denounce any one! You take her for some other person!"

They separated with these words, the cruelty of which the young man did not realize at the moment. He said to himself in justification, "She deserves to be punished for having dared to believe Alyette capable of the same baseness as herself!"

It was in such terms that the lover spoke of Emmeline, yet, for her sake, he encountered real danger. He had not told the entire truth to this woman, in whom it was necessary to

restore confidence. He realized that the note read by a jealous husband, and after Emmeline's singular falsehood might appear, in much, equivocal, and there was no small display of courage in the assumption of easy assurance with which he met De Sarlève. To his surprise, he found that it was uncalled for. At the first glance, he saw what to him seemed inexplicable, that the man was embarrassed in his presence, a sort of embarrassment that disconcerted even D'Aydie, and with awkwardness he said:

"Is not Mme. de Sarlève here? I called to ask if she has any commissions for Paris."

"You are going?" said De Sarlève. "It is a sudden start, is it not?"

"Sudden?" responded D'Aydie. "Why so? My stay ought not to have lasted but ten days, and this is the eleventh."

"My wife will regret not having seen you," replied the husband, who added, after a moment of silence:

"Have you taken leave of the De Lautrecs?"

"Not as yet," said the young man, "but I am on my way there now. Do you know if Mme. de Lautrec is at home?"

"I do not know," replied Sarlève, in a tone which led Bertrand, as he descended to Alyette's floor, to think: "I was right. He has opened the letter. He has discovered nothing, and he is disconcerted at the thought that Mme. de Lautrec will speak of his act. At least, I wish Alyette to know that I am in despair over what has happened."

It was not alone the passionate idea of justifying himself which thrilled his heart to such an extent that he could distinctly hear its throbbings when he arrived at the entrance where the valet of the De Lautrecs was in waiting. For three days, during which he had known Alyette to be cognizant of his *liaison* with Emmeline he had anticipated with dread the moment when he

should meet her. What could he say to her? All allusions, even the most remote, to his intrigue with Emmeline were impossible; nevertheless it was impossible for him to be near this pure, delicate woman, who now was for him the only one in the world, and remain under the bane of her contempt. The time appeared to him long between the moment when he sent to inquire if Mme. de Lautrec would receive him and the return of the servant who brought the reply:

"Mme. la Marquise regrets that she is suffering too much to receive. She sends this letter to Monsieur."

When Bertrand tremblingly opened the envelope he found it enclosed another envelope, which was unopen. It was his letter, on which the name of Mme. de Sarliève was written with his own hand. The seal was intact. His emotions were so profound that he could scarcely go down the stairs. His legs trembled beneath him.

When outside in Berkeley Square he raised his eyes toward the win-

dows behind which had transpired a scene the nature of which was now revealed in the document he held. Since Guy de Sarlièvе had left his letter with Mme. de Lautrec it must be because she had accepted Emmeline's lie. She must have said, "Yes, this letter is for me." Thus she, the irreproachable, the saintly, had accepted the sacrifice of acknowledging that she carried on a clandestine correspondence. What an immolation! One impossible to credit, and for what reason, and for whom had it been made? Bertrand dared not reply. It now seemed as if, through playing the part she had for a month, that of screen-friend, she had become to a certain degree an accomplice; the frightful demand made by Emmeline upon the generosity of their common dupe he felt to be such a wrong to this beautiful soul that he could not permit himself to say: "Did she do this for me? To save me from the danger she saw for me? If so, *it is because she loves me.*" He

did not say the words, but a sort of sacred emotion whispered the thought, and, at the same time—oh, the everlasting egotism in the heart of man when he is about to cease to love!—a revolt almost furious seized him against the one who had ensnared him and led him to commit what he considered a crime against Alyette. She awaited him, however, this poor woman whose fault he alone had no right to condemn. But now she had sought him, in her hour of mortal peril, and as her only protector. Nothing in all this weighed against the passionate impulse of love which possessed D'Aydie at this instant to avenge the woman he loved against the one he had loved. For he now knew that he loved Mme. de Lautrec. He felt this with a certainty which interdicted even the hope of meeting her again. This double evidence rendered him at this instant implacable.

When D'Aydie arrived at the corner of New Bond and Maddox

Streets, where Mme. de Sarliève awaited him, he entertained for her the most unjust, the most fierce aversion. In a word, he hated her for the love he bore another.

"Well?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Well," he replied, in a hard, cynical tone. "You can return to your hotel. It is as I predicted. Your husband is ready to ask pardon for having suspected you. He knows nothing. Mme. de Lautrec has taken your infamy upon herself."

"My infamy!" she replied, more overcome by the tone of the young man than by the news he brought. They had left the corner and hailed a cab, which he motioned her to enter, reiterating:

"Yes, your infamy. But we have not time now to tell ourselves all the truth. You must return to the hotel at once."

"How strangely you speak to me," she said, still more agitated. "When shall I see you again? You must explain this to me."

"I have nothing to explain to you," he said, still more coldly. "I start to-night for Paris. Good-bye."

"Surely I am dreaming," she replied, wildly. "Bertrand, recollect yourself. It is I, your Emmeline, whom you love!"

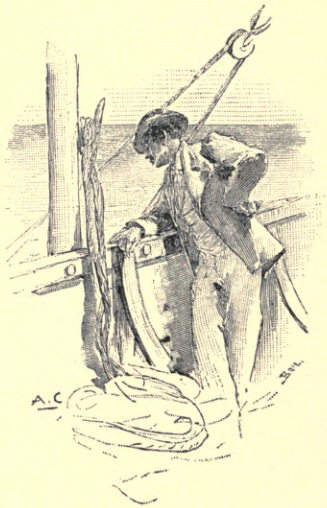
Then as he shook his head in token of denial, she uttered a wild cry: "Ah! Is it, then, true?"

In a voice full of feverish passion, and never to be forgotten, he replied:

"Yes, it is true I love Alyette. I love her—do you hear?—I love her; I love her, and I have never loved but her,—and you,—once more, good-bye. After what has passed, I cannot see you again. I feel that I hate you too bitterly."

VII

Is it the End?



CHAPTER VII.

Is it the End?

Bertrand d'Aydie kept his word. He left London that night after having written Mme. de Lautrec a letter, which was returned to him, like the other—the seal unbroken. Some days later his friends were told that he had taken his departure for a tour around the world. In some of the more recent letters received from him, he announced his intention of exploring Africa. In exile he sought to restore his self-respect and esteem, which he deemed lost forever, but this act of expiation did not save him from the criticism of his friends.

"What a *poseur* is D'Aydie. You may remember that he once made love his mission; now he has turned explorer," was said by one of the clubmen.

"Alyette de Lautrec was his last flame," was the answer. "Poor little woman! It is a pity that her health is not better. She returned this year from the East to visit the Springs."

"He must also miss Mme. de Sarlève, does he not, Guy?"

"Doubtless," dryly replied Emmeline's husband, who had chanced to mingle with the group.

There was in this brief reply a certain tone that led one of the group to say, as De Sarlève sauntered on:

"What ails him? Do you not think he has changed frightfully the last few months?"

"He drinks," was the rejoinder.

"With such a wife as he has, so charming, so sprightly, so winning, it is unpardonable," said Crucé, shrugging his shoulders. "Here is another specimen of the fools of the day. In my time we were not afraid of being drunk; but, like true Frenchmen, with true wine which enlivened and rendered gay, we enjoyed life. Now the new mixed

drinks, cocktails and other mixtures which come from England and America, play the mischief with the head and make a fool of a fellow. I bet there is whisky at the bottom of this change in De Sarlève."

"You are right," said one of the bystanders, "as may be seen any evening at Philippe's, where he is always to be found. But what does De Sarlève's wife say to all this?"

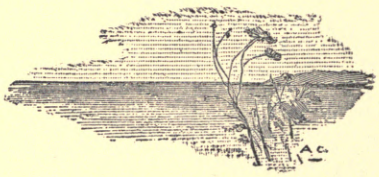
"His wife?" replied one of the young men. "She goes her way and he goes his. I often wonder if she ever sees him. Casal is with her constantly now."

"He will have his labor for his pains," said Crucé, shrugging his shoulders again. "She is a friend of Mme. de Lautrec, which is a sufficient guarantee for her good behavior. Her husband, nevertheless, deserves the yellow pavilion."

Without realizing the intense comicality of this brevet of lofty virtue discerned in Emmeline through the name of her friendship for

Alyette, the old Parisian continued to instruct his disciples at the club, among whom he had the reputation of knowing the world, and thus the screen-friend continued, unknown to all, to save the honor of the one who had wronged her.

Life has its ironies.



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